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ABSTRACT

To ascertain how evaluation has fared in the eighties, the Austin Independent School District surveyed the 94 largest school districts (including Hawaii and Puerto Rico) shown in the Directors of Research and Evaluation Network directory. A usable return rate of 63 percent was received for data analysis. As expected, the overall number of students eligible for Title I services increased as the overall enrollments in large cities continued to decrease. The average program budget decreased along with the average Title I evaluation budget. The average number of clerical, professional, and administrative staff declined. A smaller percentage decrease in overall federal funds for evaluation looks as though Title I funding may be taken up by other sources of federal monies. A surprise comes in the increase in local dollars for evaluation. It would appear that local school systems do value the evaluation services they are receiving. The survey form and district responses to the question of whether there were changes in evaluation due to the reduction of federal funds are appended. (PN)

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IS THERE EVALUATION AFTER FEDERAL CUTBACKS?

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Austin Independent School District

Along with compensatory education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 introduced research and evaluation units into numerous school systems around the country. In a very real sense, evaluation's testing period was the 1970's and the report on that trial is now coming in. Do research and evaluation contribute to school systems at levels that justify their cost in local dollars? When federal dollars become scarce and the level of evaluation optional will evaluation be cut?

In my own mind there are many parallel ways to think about compensatory education and research and evaluation. Both sets of activities are almost moral imperatives in contemporary American education. Too, my own experience in education is inextricably tied to both. My first job was teaching minority children in a Texas school district. I learned more that year than my students, I'm afraid. For example, as an inexperienced, uncertified teacher in 1971, I was placed in the most difficult of teaching situations - the lower level of two tracked classes at 5th grade in that ghetto school, with 42 children when the migrants came in. I was warned not to let my students speak their native language and to reprimand students who addressed me as "Mees Holley." I learned that those poor children in that school district were not high priority, as I compared the run down facility where I taught with the shiny new facility being built in the neighborhood in which I lived. I also noted that the experienced 5th grade

teacher was "rewarded" with the higher group.

When I entered the evaluation field in 1971 with my fresh degree in research via Title I program planning, I saw evaluation as an essential tool to remedy this lack of knowledge which seemed to be prevalent in our education of poor children. My twelve years in this role convinces me that this lack of knowledge is even more pervasive than I realized at that time. Intuitive decision-making is so pervasive in education that it borders on the unbelievable; with ramifications for the cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of our educational system. Evaluation or data-based management in general are absolute necessities for school systems, whether we're talking about the education of poor children or running all the nation's schools.

In Austin, we moved gradually during the Seventies from a "program evaluation," based on a hybrid discrepancy model, toward a "data-base," a generalized data-collection model from which systemwide studies, program evaluation, and in particular, planning information, can be drawn. We eliminated many program-specific data collection efforts in favor of selected targeted questions on systemwide surveys. Always, we have tried to move closer to the real, central concerns of the school district.

I mention these things because I believe that in many school districts evaluation has met the test and local funding of evaluation has increased as federal funding has decreased; in others, however, the opposite is true. A crucial difference may be in how the evaluation unit serves the school district.

In order to get some idea of how evaluation has fared in the Eighties, our office surveyed the 94 largest school districts (including Hawaii

and Puerto Rico) shown on the Directors of Research and Evaluation Network directory. The survey form is shown as Attachment 1.

By our closing date we had received 60 responses, one of which could not be adequately interpreted. We received two after data analysis was complete for a total return of 66% and a useable return rate of 63% or 59 responses used of a total of 94 possible. Mean responses are shown on the sample response form which is Attachment 1.

It is of contextual interest to note that overall enrollments in the large cities are continuing to decrease. Only 12 of the 59 districts had enrollment increases and 7 of those increases occurred in districts with total enrollments below the median (1980-81) of 56,145. Only 4 districts with higher enrollments had increases.

As would be expected, the overall number of students eligible for Title I services also increased with the greatest number of increases coming in the districts above the median enrollment. Five of 29 high enrollment districts had increases, but only three of 29 lower enrollment districts. Despite this overall increase in numbers eligible, the average number receiving services decreased although again eight districts did show increases. The increase in number served did not necessarily come in the cities with increases in number eligible.

The average program budget decreased from 8.5 to 7.5 million dollars. The average Title I evaluation budget dropped sharply, from $122,233 to $100,622. The number of personnel also declined. The average number of clerical staff in evaluation went from 1.79 to 1.40; the average professional staff dropped from 1.75 to 1.50 and the average administrative staff from .45 to .37.

There was a smaller percentage decrease in overall federal funds for evaluation and it looks as though some of the slack for Title I may have been taken up by other sources of federal funds. The total estimated expenditure was $120,096 for 1982-83.

The pleasant surprise, however, comes in the increase in local dollars for evaluation, up from $222,045 to $249,100. Evidently, local school systems do value the evaluation services they are receiving. Clerical and professional staff numbers are down somewhat, but locally supported administrative staff is up.

Responses to the question of whether there were changes in evaluation due to the reduction of federal funds were interesting, and responses have been appended in the final pages of this paper. The responses do not indicate to me that most school systems are yet feeling drastic impact, but several indicate that they see the big cuts as due in the future. However, I believe we live in an age where people demand information to such an extent that we cannot go back. Evaluation is here to stay, and I believe we are learning to provide it more effectively and at lower cost.

ATTACHMENT 1

FEDERAL FUNDING SURVEY

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY BY GIVING THE FUND AMOUNTS AND NUMBERS OF STUDENTS FOR 1980-81 AND FOR 1982-83. NAME OF YOUR DISTRICT N = 59

	Means: 1981-82	Means: 1982-83
TOTAL number of students in the district	87,881	85,453
Number of students ELIGIBLE for TITLE I/CHAPTER 1	23,890	24,920
Number of students SERVED by TITLE I/CHAPTER 1	15,289	14,086
TOTAL TITLE I/CHAPTER 1 PROGRAM BUDGET (include evaluation funding)	$ 8,572,240	$ 7,595,024
Evaluation funds from LOCAL/STATE sources	$ 222,045	$ 249,100
Number of LOCAL/STATE funded evaluation staff: CLERICAL	3.20	2.87
PROFESSIONAL	2.82	2.75
ADMINISTRATIVE	1.39	1.43
Evaluation funds from ALL FEDERAL sources	$ 124,578	$ 120,096
Number of FEDERALLY funded evaluation staff: CLERICAL	2.05	1.60
PROFESSIONAL	2.61	2.02
ADMINISTRATIVE	.46	.42
Evaluation funds from TITLE I/CHAPTER 1	$ 122,233	$ 100,622
Number of TITLE I/CHAPTER 1 evaluation staff: CLERICAL	1.79	1.40
PROFESSIONAL	2.35	1.90
ADMINISTRATIVE	.45	.37

HAVE THE REDUCTIONS IN FEDERAL FUNDS (SPECIFICALLY TITLE I/CHAPTER 1) MADE A DIFFERENCE IN EVALUATION ACTIVITIES, POLICIES, AND/OR PROCEDURES IN YOUR DISTRICT?

SEE PAGES FOLLOWING.

Please continue on the back.

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HAVE THE REDUCTIONS IN FEDERAL FUNDS (SPECIFICALLY TITLE I/CHAPTER 1) MADE A DIFFERENCE IN EVALUATION ACTIVITIES, POLICIES, AND/OR PROCEDURES IN YOUR DISTRICT?

Yes. We have to rely more on the personnel out at the school site to do the actual evaluation.

Yes, two positions were already out from Ch. 1 evaluation and one more person will be cut this year. Process evaluation will suffer as a result, and the quantity of help we can provide instructional staff will, too.

The loss of 1.5 Chapter 1 professionals has affected the number of Chap. 1 site visitations and has eliminated Chapter 1 process evaluation.

No, it has not.

All evaluation funds for personnel come from local sources. It is impossible to complete this form. The Director of Research writes up the portion of the Chapter 1 evaluation dealing with achievement. $6,000 was budgeted to cover test scoring for Chapter 1 students only. This has not changed in three years. Previously, a psychologist was hired by Chapter 1 to supervise the entire process. Three years ago that position was eliminated.

Yes, from the inception of the Title I program in our district, the Department of Research and Evaluation was closely involved with the implementation as well as the evaluation and monitoring of the program. This has changed, partly due to changes of organization in the district as well as funding changes. With the cutbacks anticipated in federal funds, the Research and Evaluation position of Title I Specialist (Ass't to Project Director) was changed to Title I Monitor (no longer an administrative function). Our Research and Evaluation Department is still responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Title I/Chapter 1 program, but is no longer as closely tied to planning and implementation. This is unfortunate as these functions are so closely intertwined.

No.

No. Although the total amount of overall support has dwindled, the commitment and support at the local level for good evaluation has remained constant.

No. Reassignment of responsibilities has enables us to maintain the same level of evaluation activities.

No.

Reductions in Title I/Chapter 1 have had relatively little impact on the 1982-83 evaluation activities. The major impact has come from local administrative decisions in two areas. The first decision area entails a

"freeze" on positions--including externally-funded positions. (Our system was reorganized in August 1982, and our department was "locked in" to a maximum number of positions.) As a consequence, we have approved funding for evaluation activities that cannot be fully implemented--i.e., the current number of assigned staff cannot absorb all of the funded evaluation assignments. The second decision area, related to the first, centers on the nature of the proposed Chapter II Block grant activities and associated evaluation activities. The Block Grant monies (approximately $1,000,000) are being used primarily for activities that will be documented (and reported) reducing the evaluator role (if any) to that of a consultant and reducing related evaluation monies to $8,973, a very small fraction of what would normally be assigned to a $1,800,000 funding.

The evaluation process itself remains intact, however, the position Coordinator of Chapter I Evaluation has been reduced to a half-time position. The State Department of Education has reduced some data requirements for the evaluation, but that has not yet impacted the district's evaluation plan.

The reduction in federal funds limits the acquisition of materials and the hiring of necessary personnel.

To some extent, however, the most serious losses of funds will be felt later in this state.

No: except for 80-81, an unusual year, all Title I/Chapter 1 evaluation has been very limited (Model A analysis of NRT data).

Reduction in federal funds to date have had only a minimal effect upon evaluation activities, policies, and procedures. However, since our budget for evaluation is a "bare-bones budget," any further reduction in funds will have a significant effect upon all facets of evaluation.

Testing and research service has been significantly reduced due to <u>overall</u> changes (reduction) in funding.

There has not been a net reduction in federal funds in this district. Reductions in individual programs have not made a difference in evaluation activities, policies, and/or procedures. We are fortunate that both the Superintendent and the Board recognize the abilities and usefulness of the Research, Planning and Evaluation Division.

No.

Very little; slightly less on-site observations.

The reductions in federal funds have not affected evaluation activities in this district.

No. Other than supplies and materials, evaluation services have been supplied through in-kind support by the local research office.

Yes. Budget reductions have resulted in the elimination of the full-time evaluator. The position responsibilities are being shared by two members of the Chapter 1 administrative staff.

It has affected the quantity of evaluation that can be provided both in the number of projects evaluated and the number of activities within each project. Greatest reduction has been in process evaluation which makes us wonder if we are evaluating non-events.

No.

No. This district has been weaning itself from dependency on federal funds for research and evaluation--most especially for staffing. We have probably gotten more efficient.

No. There have been many changes in evaluation activities, but these may be attributed to the administrative goal of site based management/evaluation.

No.

Yes, elimination of summer school and reduction in staff and materials. Evaluation activities remained the same due to the Chapter 1 requirements.

Not yet! We expect that 1984-85 will be the year of the big cut and resultant changes.

It has caused us to eliminate selected reports and to reduce services to schools.

No, the State Department of Education has requested that the local district continue using the national evaluation models and report as in previous years.

No. Parent involvement and mature staff carry on an excellent program.

No.

The following differences from 1980-81 are noteable with respect to Chapter 1 evaluation: a) reduction of 0.5 (FTE) Chapter 1 evaluation staff; b) Elimination of a Chapter 1 early childhood program in 1982-83 that had served 3 and 4-year-olds since 1970. During the final year of this program, approximately $2200. in evaluation funds were budgeted; c) Use of an instrument for pre-post Chapter 1 evaluation that is administered to all students in the district (grade 4 and above) during the fall. This change, initiated in 1981-82, has resulted in a savings for cost of testing materials etc. paid for by Chapter 1 funds.

We have reduced the size, scope and quantity of reports that were formerly completed. We are making every attempt to put as much of our work on the computer as possible.

Too early to say decisively.

No. Our allocation in 1980-81 was based on 1970 census figures whereas this year's allocation was based on the 1980 census figures. (This District is in an area of rapid population growth.)

Evaluation activities are relatively the same as far as basic evaluation procedures. However, "extras" have been eliminated. For example: Testing has been streamlined so that school system testing data can be used where possible, rather than Chapter 1 testing children district-wide.

Able to provide services to fewer children.

Yes. Reduction in funds caused reduction of full time evaluation positions Now must go to the use of third party evaluators. Lose daily contact of evaluator. Fund reductions have caused us to look for more economical ways to perform required evaluations, i.e. "piggy back" on to the district and/or state testing programs.

Not to any great extent yet.

No.

Evaluation activities have been reduced to include mainly minimal requirements. There no longer is the staff to explore evaluation questions which might be more relevant to education than those dealing with these requirements.

We spend less time engaging in "process" evaluation activities and miscellaneous studies. Most of the time we work on needs assessment, eligibility evaluation.

The reduction in federal funds have affected: - the number of schools served; - the number of grades served; - the pupil/teacher assistant ratio; - the professional Chapter I staff (reduced).

Yes. However, the reductions have had a minimal effect. By virtue of clerical reductions we have lost some flexibility for data reduction and can no longer accept short turnaround requests for discretionary studies.

The reductions in federal funds have resulted in a reduction in staff which has limited our ability to do timely process evaluation. The staff reductions have not been proportional to the school reductions; the frequency and duration of school visitations have consequently been reduced.

Yes. Evaluation activities have been reduced.

With a 50 percent reduction in staff, the scope of the 1982-83 Chapter 1 evaluation will be reduced and assistance in completing 1981-82 evaluation tasks is being provided by staff who are locally funded. Dependence on the systems's computer services has been particularly problematic.

No reductions took place due to loss of Federal funds. The reduction of 1 professional staff member was due to attrition and the position was not refilled due to anticipated cut backs associated with ECIA legislation. When the district's funds were not cut severly, the state and local monetary reduction prohibited the refilling of this position.

No.